

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

Playground Safety Week—April 26 – 30, 2004

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When thinking about playground safety, I recall the days of my youth and the playgrounds that I frequented. I grew up in a very small rural area where the people knew little or nothing about an organized delivery system. That meant the only access we had to playgrounds was the local elementary school. The equipment was primitive to say the least and very little was available for our leisure pursuits. Even the municipalities that were incorporated provided little in the way of parks and playgrounds.

The equipment that we used was usually limited to swings, slides, merry-go-rounds, seesaws and jungle gyms. However, our creative minds enabled us to use the equipment in ways that never entered the minds of parents, school personnel and the equipment manufacturers. Needless to say, some of us suffered broken arms, lacerations, sprains, bruises and being rendered unconscious by falls to the ground. Some lost their lives due to playground accidents.

Enterprising adults and groups sympathetic to our plight began to design and build playgrounds that provided more excitement. Wood, screws, nails, ropes and tires were put to good use and our playgrounds became more creative and more fun. Some institutions of higher education got involved and produced plans for those wooden structures. Injuries, some of them debilitating or fatal, were still a problem and litigation over those injuries prompted the cessation of home built and school designed structures.

Since my playgrounds left little to the imagination, some enterprising adults came up with the idea to provide “adventure playgrounds.” If memory serves me correctly, the idea came across the Atlantic Ocean from England. The idea behind “adventure playgrounds” was to provide the materials, usually boards, tires, ropes, nails and the tools needed by the users to construct play equipment. However, in England the King can do no wrong and litigation was not a problem. That is not true in the United States and litigation brought the “adventure playgrounds” to an early end.

Litigation did present a serious problem, but a more serious problem was the injuries and fatalities that were caused by hazardous playground equipment and the use zones around that equipment. Prevention of those injuries and fatalities was a cause that needed to be addressed. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) have produced safety standards for playground equipment and use zones. The National Recreation and Park Association has joined the cause and created the National Playground Safety Institute (NPSI). The NPSI is responsible for the provision of the playground safety certification course and examination with the end result being Certified Playground Safety Inspectors (CPSI). In

order to increase the number of certified inspectors, courses are offered at different locations throughout the year.

The Parks and Recreation Technical Advisory Service (PARTAS) has personnel who have earned their certification and have capability to conduct playground safety inspections for your agency. However, each agency is encouraged to send personnel to complete the course and take the examination in order to achieve their certification. The course and examination will be provided prior to the 2004 TRPA Annual Conference in November.

Playground safety is too important to be taken lightly and that is why it is important to become certified. There are a host of individuals throughout the state who aren't aware of the playground safety standards that are available. The result of their ignorance is playgrounds that are hazardous and unsafe for children. If more people become certified to inspect playgrounds, that ignorance can be reduced greatly and possibly eliminated. Our goal is the provision of playgrounds that will be safe and enjoyable havens for our children. Some tips on playground safety have been provided.